

Trespassing

Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin

Everything has its purpose: the long-gone past and the instantaneous present. We perceive the different periods in our art in totality as one organic union, whose balance is maintained as in a live organism. Our art is always our thread of Ariadne that leads us through the labyrinths of life. On every occasion, we feel the necessity to rise in consciousness above the limitations of the moment, to break free from the temporal aspects of events and to glance from the particular to the universal.

The beginning of that artistic thread traces back to Russia during those hopeful years of the seventies when, in Moscow art circles, we were called “conceptualists.” We described some of the evolutionary events and vistas of that past in our early book *Russian Samizdat Art*,¹ which appeared in 1986, seven years after our departure from Russia in July 1979. The book summarized the ideas and trends of the underground art movement, focusing predominantly on its conceptual wing. If literature had to thrive on the practice of self-publishing (*samizdat* in Russian), art was surviving in a similar manner, being equally self-motivated, self-sufficient, and isolated from Soviet public life. In such circumstances, conceptualism, which often employs language and different, rather unusual methods, was especially vulnerable to the official censorship; therefore, in the Soviet context it became an appropriate part of the *samizdat* movement as a whole, representing its most peculiar conceptual branch.

To get a better picture of *samizdat* art, one has to refract the rays of the entirety of nonconformist activity through the prism of art. The result can be described as a hybrid of conceptual art, visual and concrete poetry, artists’ books, documentation of performances, and installations. It was not a replication of the Western style, which immediately comes to mind when one sees the term “conceptualism.” *Samizdat* art was indeed conceptual in its guise, and was something that was brewing in the isolated, virtually hermetic, vessel of Soviet Russia, whose con-

stitution permitted almost everything *de jure*, but where almost everything was forbidden *de facto*.

In the seventies, conceptual *samizdat* art was an attractive forbidden fruit that ripened illegally on the tree of life in the Soviet paradise. As artists we partook of that fruit, not fully aware that one day we would have to leave. Our 1977 performance *Costumes*, in which we were dressed in garments featuring drawn “costumes” of Adam and Eve (see, elsewhere in this volume, Ekaterina Bobrinskaia, “Moscow Conceptual Performance Art in the 1970s,” Fig. 14), seemed already to predict our departure to the many-tongued land of good and bad opportunities. While living in Moscow, our works were frequently smuggled abroad. During the Eastern European Biennial in Venice in 1977, the international press picked up our performance *Zoo*—in which we were seated naked in a cage labeled “Homo sapiens, a group of mammals, male and female” (see Bobrinskaia, “Moscow Conceptual Performance Art in the 1970s,” Fig. 15)—as a symbol of the encagement of Russian culture by the Soviet regime. As one might expect, this focal event created for us many problems with the authorities that subsequently led to our emigration.

The echo of that maverick period was resounded in the exhibition *Russian Samizdat Art* that we put together in 1982 at the Franklin Furnace Gallery, one of the now-legendary alternative spaces in New York. Designing the installation, we wanted to express the intellectual wit, absurdity, and wilderness of the underground art movement while at the same time connecting it to our heritage of the Russian avant-garde and the group of absurdist writers known as the Oberiuty. Following the communal style of the apartment exhibitions held in Moscow and other cities in the Soviet Union beginning in the sixties, we displayed the works of forty Russian artists, including us: Natalia Abalakova, Andrei Abramov, Nikita Alekseev, Vagrish Bakhchanyan, Vilen Barsky, Nikolai Bokov, William Brui, Eric Bulatov, Michael Chernyshov,

Fig. 1 Rimma Gerlovina with her cubes, Moscow, 1976 / Photo archive of the artist /

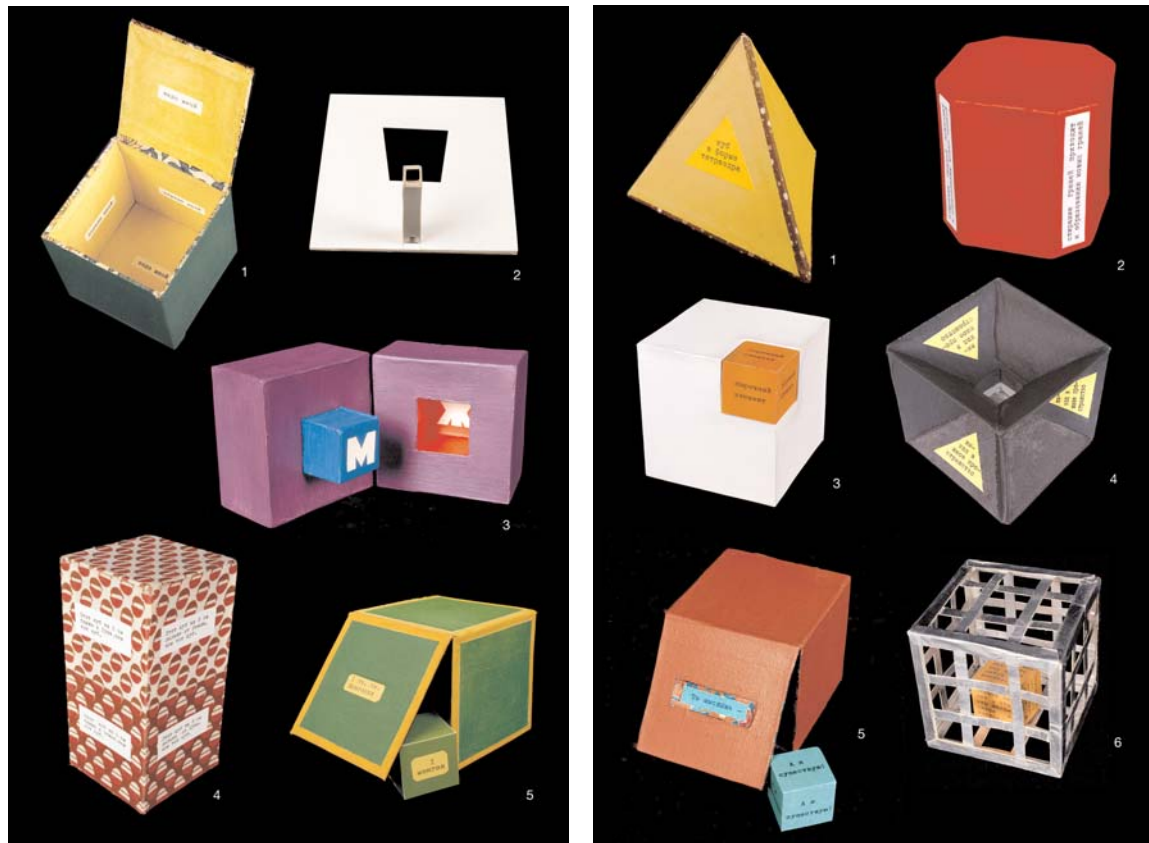


Galina Goloveiko, Valentin Goroshko and Liz Clark, Michael Grobman, Ilya Kabakov, Gregory Kopelian, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, Henry Khudiakov, Konstantin Kuzminsky, Leonid Kuznetsov, Leo Lapin, Igor Makarevich, Andrei Monastyrsky, the members of the Mukhomor (Toadstool) group, Vsevolod Nekrasov, Lev Nussberg, Dmitrii Prigov, Lev Rubinstein, Leonid Sokov, Victor Tupitsyn, Anatolii Ur, Nikifor Zayats, and Anatolii Zhigalov. The floor was covered with Soviet posters that looked like paper rugs, and some books were suspended on ropes from a big red ladder. During our opening performance (for which the composer Charles Morrow wrote a sonorous overture), we climbed the ladder and tossed leaflets, booklets, and sunflower seeds, all of which remained on the floor as part of the installation. Attached to the middle pole of the gallery, Rimma's *Interchangeable Man* (see Fig. 6), a red figure with outstretched arms, unified the whole composition of that "underground Golgotha" in a constructivist

manner. The slogan we wrote on strips of Soviet newspapers—"The First Russian Vagabond Reading Room in the USA"—turned out to be prophetic: the exhibition ended up traveling to nine other venues in the United States and Canada, culminating in the 1984 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Soviet Russia happened to ignore those games, conveniently leaving an empty spot for extra attention to our controversial team of conceptual *samizdat* artists. After the stream of positive reviews, we received a proposal to write a book on that subject.

The past is already sealed by time, but the reflections on our beginning that caused the ensuing chain of effects are still very much alive. If we look back and try to give a general view of our early art objects, it seems that their distinctly conceptual language (not merely incorporating its elements into paintings, sculptures, and graphic arts) was rather unusual for the Russian art scene. In the early seventies, the only parallel to that conscious and mature development of a conceptual mentality

Fig. 2 Rimma Gerlovina / *The Cubes*, 1974 / Cardboard, paper, and fabric / Each cube 8 x 8 x 8 cm / Top row: *Quintessence, The Tool for Viewing Malevich's Black Square*ⁱ / Middle: *M-F*ⁱⁱ / Bottom: *Moon-Earth, A Mongolian*ⁱⁱⁱ / Collection of the artist /



and form in art could be seen in the work of Komar and Melamid, who employed different mixed media in the social context of their Sots Art. Our approach was more on the mythological and philosophical side, and our methodology was based on a consistent, structurally developed individual language. Later, and especially after our departure from Russia, the circle of conceptual artists grew considerably, and the struggle for dominance among the artists caused not only preferential policies but inevitably led to general misinformation.

The main feature of all our works, both those made separately and in collaboration, is their deployment of a language of coded simplicity. Grasping a creative process through concepts requires an alertness that is quick and clear, similar to Albert Einstein's maxim that everything should be made as simple as possible but not simpler. The style of our artwork in general has arisen out of precisely such a configuration. Akin to mythological patterns, which transmit culturally rooted ideas, even our early works made in Russia seem to be cross-cultural at their core, exactly as providence deemed our lives to become. When the

inner self has to develop a source for everything, feeding not on the temporal but on the archetypal, geographical localities become insignificant. Therefore, our lives became based upon the thought—the surviving legacy of antiquity—that one has to carry within himself all that one needs.

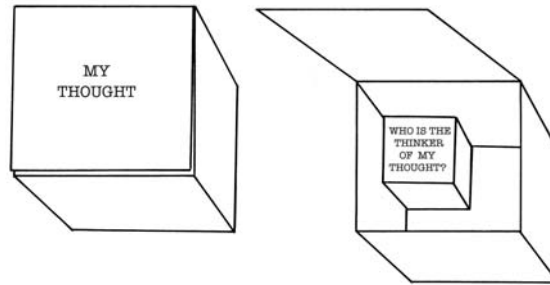
Now, if we step aside to view historically how it was seeded and proceed according to the rule “women first,” the picture of our conceptual beginning would look as follows. In 1972, Rimma began to experiment with her visual prose, typing it into specific patterns. From that she quickly moved on to scores of visual poetry intended for simultaneous reading by several voices, arranged in a sort of spoken opera. Some of these scores were written in different Slavic languages. As a student at Moscow State University, where she majored in Slavic studies, she turned the subject of her education into a creative tool. The search for the exact form seemed to be a way to enter into another dimension of conceptual poetry. And in 1974, the little cubes, portable objects of three-dimensional poetry, burst forth as if from a fountain, overflowing our entire apartment in Moscow (Fig. 1).

The solid form of the cube has traditionally been used to symbolize the material substance of the world, which is precisely the place where the hidden creative force operates.

Bearing the elements of poetry set up into the art object, the cubes are like materialized works of haiku speaking with metaphorical clarity, and yet preserving their ambiguity. A paradoxical simplicity in combination with an analytical approach, lyrical irony, and a fatalistic element organize, so to speak, the semantic environment of the cubic organisms. The characters of the homo-cubes (as they have sometimes been referred to)—especially those that talk as *dramatis personae*—are symbolically revealed as if in an anatomy theater: not nude, but naked. All of these early works were made in the same breath, and the very first cube, *Quintessence*, created in 1974, is one of the initial sparks, and perhaps the most informative (Fig. 2). In this conceptual poem we hear only its voice in the first person, which determines its location in space by the projected inscriptions “above me,” “below me,” and “around me.” The work comes as a sound of an Aeolian harp without the assistance of a player, and becomes a witness of another intangible dimension right in the middle of the tangible sides of the cube. In a poetic sense, quintessence is the voice of consciousness that *a priori* knows the mystery in which we all are situated, much like in this cube.

The cubic concepts are generally clothed in small boxes or other geometrical bodies, which contain text on the interior and/or exterior. Serving as allegorical units of time, space, or human character, they are specimens of a noetic, interactive form of three-dimensional poetry that gains new corporeal habitation in the cubes. The cubes seem to have a gift for communicating abstruse arguments to intelligent laymen. The lyrical message prompts not only reading but also literally a psychosomatic examination of these solid bodies, which, in turn, often provokes the spectator's capacity for postulating and doubting. At first, reason steps in and for the most part overcomes feeling. However, the irrational element implicit in the design of these

concepts leads sophistry into a trap: If one opens the cube containing “my thought” on the lid, what would be the answer to its interior question?



Perhaps it would be better to use the description of these works provided by our fellow artists Komar and Melamid, who happened to witness their circulation in Moscow:

Some of the cubes, large and small, bear labels describing their particular qualities, either from the author's or the cube's point of view. For example: “This cube is 5 centimeters closer to the Moon than this one”—they speak in ambiguities. Box: “There's a sphere inside me.” The inside of the cube: “He's a sphere. I'm a cube.” Box: “You think.” Small cube inside: “But I am.” This is not a dialogue, but a monologue in which the inside plays the role of an inner voice. Here we are face to face with the dichotomy of the Homo-Box's consciousness. The only woman in contemporary Russian Modernism exhibits a profound inventiveness in designing a wardrobe for her soul.²

In the seventies, the cubes looked like a new symbolic language stationed on the border between poetry and art. As any provisional base has to be tested experimentally, we will give a picture of the surrounding situation and the *vox populi* of that distant time. People often reacted with witty enthusiasm to the cubes in a reflexive response to their stimulating ideas; on one occasion the poet Genrikh Sagir spontaneously versified his psy-

Fig. 3 Rimma Gerlovina / The Cubes, 1974 / Cardboard, paper, and fabric / Each cube 8 x 8 x 8 cm / Top row: Tetrahedron, Obliteration of the Edges^{iv} / Middle: Depraved Element, Exit into Another Dimension^v / Bottom: You Think, The Cage^{vi} / Collection of the artist /

chological observation: “Yourself as her cube, she multiplies.” Some went further in their theoretical scrutiny, especially the scientists who frequently came to our home as if to a gallery. (For some time we had a *jour fixe*, a one-day-a-week open apartment for our friends, who brought their friends and others, thus keeping the chain unbroken. That was how the self-preservation of the collective singularity common to the unofficial multiplex of Russian culture developed.)

During this period, the official exhibition of our conceptual work would have been impossible. Instead, we and other fellow artists thrived on the unofficial, usually group, exhibitions in our apartments. For the moment, it was a sort of underground institution, which was constantly in conflict with the authorities. At our place, we held many readings of different Russian poets—Andrei Monastyrsky, Lev Rubinstein, and Eduard Limonov, to name a few. These periodical, noisy events, which included a reading of Rimma’s score-poems by five performers in the manner of madrigals and musical performances by the witty pop group Last Chance, greatly disturbed our neighbors, who always threatened us with police intervention. Here, as a result of many gatherings with our friends, many subversive ideas and projects were born, among them *A–Ya*, the first magazine on contemporary Russian art, which was later published by Igor Shelkovsky in Paris.

The chain of people and manifold events passed in stimulating ratio to each other. Yurii Sobolev, a man of great erudition who by merciful providence we met in Ilya Kabakov’s studio, gave us friendly support in our theoretical search. He brought into our lives his old friend Viktor Novatsky, who regularly photographed our performances and became a collaborator on several trips around the country. Through Sobolev we met European art historians, for whom we helped collect materials for the first article on Moscow Conceptualism that appeared in *Flash Art* magazine (July 1977), thereby creating a link to the Eastern European Biennial in Venice later that year. That publication highlighted the unofficial group exhibition held in 1976 at Leonid Sokov’s

studio, where besides the host, we participated along with Ivan Chuikov, Igor Shelkovsky, Sergei Shablavin, and Aleksandr Yulikov.

How the Eastern European Biennial influenced our lives we’ve already mentioned: after Rimma’s cubes were shown in the next international Biennial in 1978, the time came for us to pack. We distributed some of our works among friends, left our studio to Eduard Shteinberg; handed down the first issue of the planned art journal to Vitaly Gribkov, who subsequently incorporated it into his periodical *Metki* (Marks). Many artists let us choose their works for our collection, while Eric Bulatov drew Rimma’s portrait as a gift. It seems that the poet Vsevolod Nekrasov—who used to call Rimma “the grandmother of Russian conceptualism” in jest because of her young age—expressed the general feeling of our friends with his usual metaphorical brevity: “And you lessen our number.” As a final touch, at our seeing-off party, which was photographed by Igor Makarevich, Andrei Monastyrsky made a spontaneous performance of androgynous content while applying heavy makeup to his face. Our last evening was as merry and wild as *Finnegan’s Wake*. With this we shall break away from the world of long-past events and enter that of creative ideas.

The nature of changing and unchanging invites explanations and demonstrations of what it is about. We do not want to say in many words what one or two ably would. The cubes are precisely the form that permits shortening the method of exposition to a three-dimensional formula. For example, the Descartes axiom “I think, therefore I am” paraphrased into “You think, but I am” and presented in a cubical form brings another twist to its meaning (Fig. 3). Does human rationality have the power to transcend human finitude? The mind is always in a state of flux and yet wants to be the measure of all things. With a logically coherent metaphysical structure, one can hope to understand everything in nature, but not nature itself. It seems that genuinely clear thought can objectify itself in spontaneous understanding only if intellectual contortions are subdued by intuitive

Fig. 4 Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin / *Bird*, © 1989 / C-print / 101.6 x 101.6 cm / Collection of the artists /



simplicity, and that is not a new, learned tool but an awakened *a priori* part of our consciousness. Revealed in the sum of every natural and human event, intuition is qualitatively different from instinct. To the untrained eye, the two look alike, but it is not so. Instinct is below the rational, intuition is above it. Instinct revolts against the conscious, orderly approach, while intuition peacefully subdues it.

Sitting inside its silver cage, the yellow bird

sees that the world is in the cage (Fig. 3). People wrestle with contradictions on the subjective side no less than on the objective one. The idea of a cage-cube certainly is a mental concept. Human intelligence is related to the plane of matter as its environment and support; therefore, all cages are different in accordance with the peculiarities of the psychological dispositions of their inhabitants. Many ideas of our early work found their further



Fig. 5 Rimma Gerlovinova / *Icon*, 1974 / Cardboard, wood, and paper / 48.7 x 47.8 x 7.3 cm / Dodge Collection. 25727 /

expression in our later performances, sculptures, and finally in our conceptual photography. The image of *Bird* (Fig. 4), made fifteen years after *The Cage*, clearly points to the same metaphor. There are certain moments in life that bring to mind a bird (a traditional image of the soul) beating its wings against the bars of its cage. The ideas associated with flying, or rather, levitation as opposed to gravitation, were already implicit in Rimma's concept of the "floating" exposition of the cubes. These works were exhibited in 1979 in the Nächst

St. Stephan Gallery, Vienna, hanging by strings from the ceiling, thereby organizing visually a sort of miniature galactic space. Wandering among these small "floating" bodies, spectators could manipulate every cube. Many years later, we came across a similar image in a passage of C. G. Jung: "it seemed to me as if behind the horizon of the cosmos a three-dimensional world had been artificially built up, in which each person sat by himself in a little box... and now it had come about that I—along with everyone else—would again be hung up in a box by a thread."³

The casuistic duality of nature can be illustrated by many means. The white cube with the orange “depraved element” is one of the early examples (Fig. 3). As a cube, it represents one of the five absolute Platonic solids. However, if one removes the small orange block symbolizing a depraved element the perfect shape of that body is ruined. Every truth has a grain of mistake, and every mistake can have a grain of truth. When the ancient Chinese masters made their art objects, they used to add a tiny, almost invisible dent; they thought that the nature of our earth does not tolerate perfection, and that if they themselves did not make a slight damage to their work, nature would interfere in a much worse way. The world is full; there are no empty niches; and a definite hierarchy governs the scope of ideas, beings, and things. And some of them can be quite depraved.

The white color is a not less meaningful feature of the three-dimensional poem called *Icon* (Fig. 5). Twenty conceptual scenes of that icon unfold into a biography of a person, whose image is supposed to occupy the center of the composition. That place is left empty, signifying that it is reserved not for one particular individual but for the archetype. In the hagiographical structure of the icon, each cell suits the corresponding coded level of consciousness. This pictographical biography is kept within one *opus circulatorum*, which has many layers and many rounds but one uniting center. The idea of the progressive opening of the consciousness develops like a child that has to aggregate his parts in the womb until the moment when he is ready to “jump out.” That is precisely what is shown in the last cell of the *Icon*, which does not have a back wall; its frontal lid covers the mystery of abyss—the grave is empty.

The life of an artist usually has many twists and turns; in a way, it is a happening in itself. From the point of view of an ordinary person, it looks rather like a “mishappening,” as in Rimma’s series of *Cube-Environments* (1975), in which the spectator is turned into a performer.

The cube, 2m/6.5 feet on each side, is white inside and out. On each interior



Fig. 6 Rimma Gerlovina / *Interchangeable Child* (left), 1982 / Plywood constructions filled with cloth foam cubes, painted in acrylic / 88.9 x 81.3 x 10.2 cm / *Interchangeable Man* (right), 1981 / Plywood constructions filled with cloth foam cubes, painted in acrylic / 195.6 x 183.5 x 14 cm / Collection of the artist /

lateral side is written “TIME”; the base of the cube is marked as “SPACE.” In 15 sec., as soon as a spectator enters that life-size object, all its edges will begin to move toward the entrance, pushing the person out of the cube back through the entrance. That is an effect of time and space.

P.S. It is not that the individual disappears in time and space, but that they cease to exist for him.

1975

That paradigm represents an objective process, a kind of deliverance out of the constraints of nature, conceived and played out by nature itself, wherein the personal ego is slowly processed by the power of the impersonal.

After that series of cube-environments and a cluster of multi-cell objects such as *Pyramid*, *Paradise–Purgatory–Hell*, and *Apartment House*, the molecular structure of the cubes was bit-by-bit transformed into the human-size figures. Like in a biological process, the small cubic cells grew into big cubic organisms. The first member of the family of humanoids was made in 1976, and shortly after we moved to New York in 1980, the first *Interchangeable Man* was recreated in full color, larger than life, and with additional progeny (Fig. 6). These human



Fig. 7 Installation view of the retrospective exhibition *An Organic Union*, Fine Arts Museum of Long Island, Hempstead, New York, 1991 / Rimma Gerlovina's *Cubic Organisms* are pictured. / Wood scaffolding with painted wooden or cloth-covered foam cubes with text or drawing on each side. The cubes can be turned over or moved around the cells of the structure. / Left to right: *Dog-Calendar*, 1982 / 172.7 x 149.9 x 12.7 cm / *Man of Babel*, 1983 / 116.8 x 175.3 x 10.2 cm / *Hagiography of Man*, 1983 / 208.3 x 116.8 x 10.2 cm / *The Wandering Heart*, 1984 / 208.3 x 81.3 x 12.7 cm / *Absolute Novel*, 1984 / 119.4 x 160.1 x 12.7 cm / *One-Man Show*, 1983 / 78.7 x 226.1 x 10.2 cm / Photo archive of the artists /

figures with outstretched arms are made of soft, fleshy cubes; each has text on every side, addressing a range of concepts from positive to negative meaning, for example, “rational – realistic – normal – queer – abnormal – crazy.” Through the cubes, it is possible to trace the line from genius to stupid, from saint to devil, and so on. The spectator has the opportunity to rearrange the cubes, creating a personality in his own image or writing his own random poetry. Each cube contains the word “normal,” to create a totally “normal” anybody. The work is based on the paradox that while man is a process of fate, he can overcome that process through well-directed personal effort. In general, the cubes can be used as an accurate psychological device to categorize people.

In terms of their structural compositions and primary colors, the series of *Cubic Organisms* continue the traditions of Russian Constructivism, but with a completely new verbal twist imbedded in their psychological, philosophical, and metaphysical context. In addition, their interchangeable structure permits the spectator's active communi-

cation with the objects in a spirit of playful participation. The series includes more than twenty large conceptual sculptures including those in pictographic hieratic poses with interactive content. For example, *Dog-Calendar* (1982; Fig. 7) consists of one hundred cubes, each representing a year, with six different prognoses written on each side of every cube. The year 2009 has the possibilities “occurrence – erosion – experiment – excess – relax – chaos,” while 2076 suggests the following alternatives: “comprehension – misconception – leisure – propriety – alliance – chaos.” Manipulating these soft cubes, the viewer creates his own model of a time-life concept. One may generate one hundred years of total chaos, since that concept is included in every set of six possibilities. The model of random order presented in this dog-sphinx contains in its potential all options, stored in the so-called organized chaos.

In the anthropomorphic sculpture *Man of Babel* (1983, Fig. 7), each side of every cube has a letter from one of six alphabets: Sanskrit, Chinese, Hebrew, Arabic, English, and Cyrillic. The multi-

lingual crowd of cubes is incorporated into the red frame of a body seated in the pose of a pharaoh. The spectator can turn and toss the cubes, creating actual words or engaging in the art of letterism. As an anthropomorphic metaphor for the Tower of Babel, this work reflects the multinational environment of New York, our contemporary Babylon—this conglomerate of everything from everywhere, in which all is branded as normal, even the most abnormal. The oversize figure of *The Wandering Jew* (1982) is divided into squares representing different countries. The viewer can move the soft blue cube marked “Wandering Jew” (symbolic of emigration) over the map of the world, hanging him by the nails that are sticking out on every country-square. *One-Man Show* (1983; Fig. 7) is also a large red man, hanging by a string from the ceiling. Like an organism that consists of many cells and a plurality of thoughts, that suspended individual is composed of fifty-one separate cubes united by one string. Each cube can be opened and contemplated; each cell holds a clue to some life experience. For example, the central interconnected cube with the interior text “I consider myself independent from the rest of the cells” suggests one of the typical individualistic thoughts that contrast with the reality of an incessant patchwork quilt of interdependence.

Summarizing general components and concepts, Rimma defined the principles behind all the cubic works in her theory of Transfism, which consists of the following theses: 1) Archetypal units and principles (cubes or other geometrical bodies and linguistic formulas); 2) Metaphorical games (as a symbolic modeling of the world and an *a priori* part of human nature); 3) Interchangeability (of time, space, sex, as a basic principle of life, and the unity of opposites); and 4) Co-creativity (of the spectator; who continues the flux of changes in the work).

Beginning in 1974 with the cubes, those portable philosophic units, Rimma arrived at the circles in 1987, lingering for some time in between with the transitional series of *Shifting Objects* of 1984–86 (*Sunset*, *Live-Dead*, *The Last Supper*, *The Shadow*, among others). There is an ancient



Fig. 8 Rimma Gerlovina / Circles, 1988 / Wood and acrylic / 34.9 cm in diameter (top and middle rows), 45.7 cm in diameter (bottom) / All the circles have a moveable element; they can be rotated, opened, or shifted. / Top row: *Or*, *Day by Day*, *Before-After*, *Momentum*, *Severity-Serenity^{vii}* / Middle: *Agoin*, *Fortune*, *Un-di-vi-ded In-di-vi-dual*, *Self*, *Nonsense^{viii}* / Bottom: *W-hole*, *Spiral Clock*, *E-art-h*, *Level^{ix}* / Collection of the artist /

dilemma behind the idea of the squaring of the circle, or, in her case, the circling of the square. That geometric operation has baffled many mathematicians and even more theologians (who viewed the soul as a circle that occupies the square of the body). As a symbol of the transcendent the circle is free from the bondage of the corners that organize the square and the cube. The square implies not only the basic arrangement of the world, but humans' constructive attempt to achieve permanence in material life. Yet amid the flux of nature, only change itself is unchanging. Nature's permanence is akin to a limitless circle that can be traced in an orderly repetitive motion: from the orbs of the planets to a single drop of rain. In medieval thought, God is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. Thus in ancient sacred architecture and in every scheme of cosmological geometry, the square and the circle are brought together and made commensurate (Fig. 8).

The round concept *Fortune* (Fig. 9) can be traced in three consequent positions: closed, as fortune; half opened, as misfortune; and fully



Fig. 9 Rimma Gerlovina / Fortune (top: in closed position; bottom: opened), 1988 / Wood and acrylic / 34.9 cm in diameter and 10.2 cm deep when folded / Collection of the artist /

opened—as misfortuneless. The wheel of fortune is itself a game of perpetual paradox. In a similar manner, when *Fortune* is closed it keeps all its mystery intact, much like a Pandora’s box. As soon as we open the first door, the powers of fortune start to cross and crisscross life, admitting man into the great ritual drama called “misfortune.” Here we stand before that mental door that the average man is afraid to open, the door that perpetually enters into itself and leads to “the way on which there is no traveling.” The direct experience might be quite turbulent, filled with the unforeseen animosity of the surroundings. Then the second door can be opened. It leads to the full outcome of the experience and reshapes the

previous malformation. The blind thesis of fortune followed by the antithesis of misfortune is resolved in the fully conscious synthesis or union of opposites—in the misfortuneless. It is like arriving at a state of fullness after passing through emptiness. Genuine fullness cannot be full unless it includes emptiness as well.

We were simultaneously drawn to forms that corresponded to ideas, particularly circles. If Rimma was versatile predominantly with the word-concepts, Valeriy was at home with the archetypal forms—as if she employed the algebraic method of conceptualism, while he preferred the geometric one. From the beginning, Valeriy tried to trace the initial seed patterns out of which nature cast out her paragon of shapes. The abyss or division between divinity and humanity is filled with a variety of archetypes, which run the gamut from live beings to inanimate objects. His geometrical works, be they graphic series, oil paintings, or objects, appear like x-rays of the imagination, which reveal only typical content and skip the rest. Such are his early series of monoprints *Road Signs* (1973), featuring topographical landscapes, and *Figures* (1974), based on the matrix of an invented script. The process used to produce the latter series was rather unusual: Valeriy made the prints in colored carbon paper using a variety of techniques, including exerting heat and pressure, drawing, and punching holes.

In 1974, he began to work with natural elements—metal, earth, and bread—in sculptural form. Using metal erector sets, he assembled different linear forms, objects, and three-dimensional scenes; some of them were mounted on metal stands, while others were displayed on the wall in glass cases in the manner of butterfly collections. For example, in *The Metamorphosis of the Frog* three metal amphibians depict the sequence of the mutation from tadpole to fully-grown frog. Two tree branches, a real one and its stainless-steel replica, are displayed in correlation to each other in two windows in the herbarium titled *Branch* (1975). In Valeriy’s series of metal objects, he found the seals and fragmentations that might be

termed “the geometry of nature,” the best theoretical model of which is described by the fractal relationship of everything to everything, wherein big and small repeat each other albeit on a different scale. Partitioned into the manageable pieces of the erector sets, Valeriy’s sculptures carry the scale alongside the fragmentation. The bits and pieces of the erector sets can be assembled into one coherent whole; at the same time, their order contains a multiplicity of subordinated parts whose precision and structure exhibit a certain relationship to mathematical sets. Perhaps some parallelism in the artistic openness to the general outflow of world ideas can be seen in the fact that *Fractal Geometry* dates to 1975—the same year that the erector sets “flowed” from Valeriy. The laws underlying the regularities of nature can be shown not only by formulas but also by the intuitive artistic investigation that is similar to the impact of music, described by Leibniz as the pleasure the human soul experiences from counting without being aware that it is counting.

Art helps embody the modes of being in an abstract and removed manner. The distance may vary from macro to micro, as in Valeriy’s sculptures *Lightning* and *A Spermatozoon* (Fig. 10). In the latter, he makes a biological attempt to trace an invisible device of nature by assembling a male reproductive cell from an erector set. A bolt of lightning and a spermatozoon can be viewed in equal ratio to each other as objective and subjective forces symbolically showing the same penetrating, fiery power of nature, one demonstrated in the sky, the other in the human organism.

Other emblematic geometric characteristics of the human body are captured in *Leonardo’s Man* (picturing man within the circle and the square) and the sculpture *Madonna and Child*. The technical austerity of Valeriy’s image of motherhood in its shorthand visual formula is repeated in many other works. In the erector-set mise-en-scène *A Party Meeting* (1975), Valeriy geometrizes the sociological structure of the event depicted. Having graduated as a stage designer from the School-Studio of the Moscow Art Theater of

Stanislavsky (MKhAT), he often applies his learned skill of making hyperrealistic scale models. Operating in abstractions but not burdened by them, he uses representative rather than actual historical precursors. Thus, in depicting the fundamental qualities of objects and ideas, Valeriy strips them of the affections of the senses, bringing them closer to the Kantian qualities of a thing-in-itself, in which the unique, imperishable matrixes multiplied by time and space become innumerable perishable objects. Highlighting only the essential ingredients as being necessary for the understanding of the whole, Valeriy tries to create forms that should rather be called meta-forms. The blueprints of ideas abide in our memory storage; therefore, their live representations can be easily recognized in art, especially in its conceptual branch.

Fig. 10 Valeriy Gerlovin / Erector-set sculptures, 1974-75 / Stainless steel; some sculptures are on metal stands / Top row: *Leonardo’s Man* / 28.8 x 28.8 cm / *A Star* / 28 x 28 cm / *A Leaf* / 34 x 20 cm / Bottom: *A Spermatozoon* / 5 x 13 cm / *An Apple* / 28.8 x 28.8 cm / *A Foot* / 29 x 13 cm / *Madonna and Child* / 22 x 10 x 10 cm / Collection of the artist /

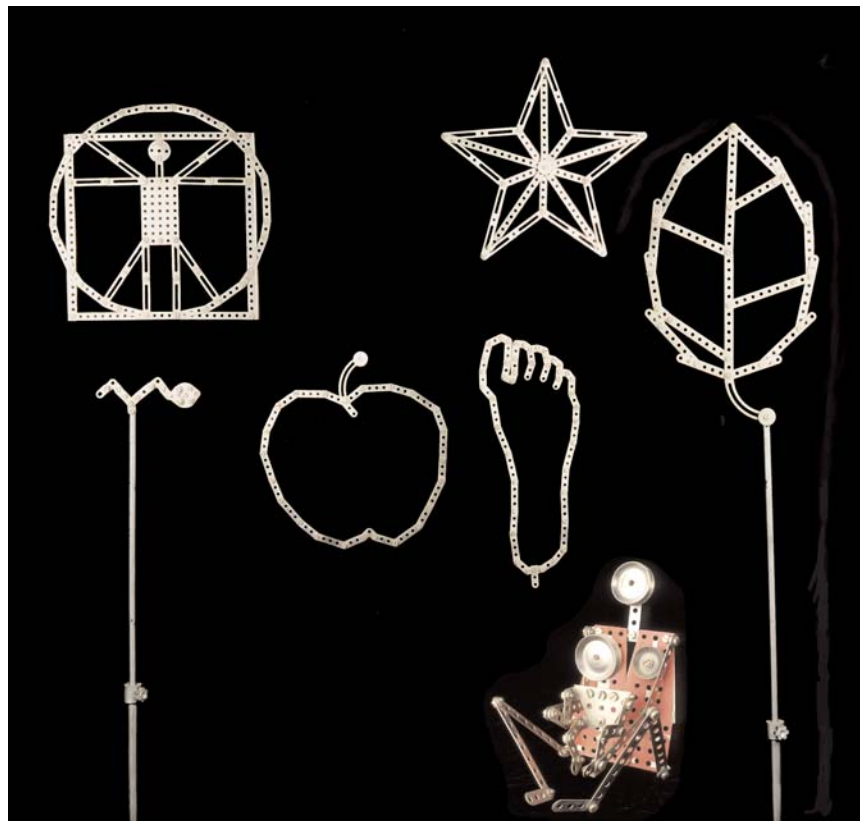




Fig. 11 Valeriy Gerlovin at his studio in Moscow, 1977 / *One Square Meter of Earth* can be seen on the bottom, left. / Photo by Igor Makarevich / Photo archive of the artist /

In 1976, Valeriy's erector-set sculptures played a fatal role in the performance *Interring* (see Bobrinskaia, "Moscow Conceptual Performance Art in the 1970s," Fig. 5). The guiding star of this action was nature itself; if carried to the extreme one can revert to its central law, which dictates that nothing can be preserved here on earth *ad aeternum*. Any culture, however rich, can be only a temporal pattern of life. Considering the fact that every order that follows a recurrent chaos only precedes another chaos, Valeriy played the sequence in four movements: the assembly and display of the works, and their subsequent disassembly and burial. Thus, his metal works that bear the seal of art and of nature were literally returned to their source, eventually becoming ore fossils. Preserving the general scenario of life that buries all that it produces, he rotated it on a much higher speed. Did he get a speeding ticket? Probably, yes. But he is not alone: the meticulous sand drawings made by the Buddhist monks in the open air were not intended for long lives, either.

Valeriy also created a variety of metal objects out of various ready-made parts. One of them, *The Age Apparatus* (1975), depicts the process of the narrowing vision of the world in proportion to the aging process. The metal box with the front grid, through which one can see the interior, is divided into four sections. The first is for ages zero to fifteen; the window behind that grid is left opened. In the second, for ages fifteen to thirty-five, the window is glassed; in the next, for thirty-five to sixty, the glass is frosted; and in the last, for sixty to zero (i.e., until death), the looking glass occupies the entire field of vision. In a gradual descent through planes of increasing opacity, one is alerted to the merciless impulses of time and

one's own instinctual habits, reflected in George Orwell's remark that at fifty everyone has the face he deserves. In the later years of our life, we are able to evaluate experiences more sensibly; at the same time, as our bodily vigor diminishes suppressed thoughts about permanency increase, trying to counterbalance the otherwise unpleasant process of aging. The Sages, who came to terms with the eternal at a later age, while seeing the whole world in the mirrors of their consciousness, were said to have undergone a natural process of revival. It is that kind of natural revival that goes against nature itself since the latter continues to keep us aging.

In the line of Valeriy's concepts based on three raw materials, metal, earth, and bread, *One Square Meter of Earth* (1975, 1 x 1 x 0.1 m) is the first and most virginal work of his land art series (Fig. 11). The transparent Plexiglas construction contains nothing but earth. The composition of that earth is as typical as it may be; in a way, it is a picture of itself. It includes all its organic and non-organic components, even peculiar patterns burrowed by earthworms, which make intricate pictures of their otherwise obscure lives. Such hyperrealism bordering on blunt abstraction unites the most direct with the most general. The land art series includes many objects filled with soil, such as the glass *Globe* (1975, 22.9 cm in diameter) and a variety of reliefs with glass windows. Out of the windows of the wall construction titled *The View from the Train* (1975; Fig. 12) one can see a monotonous landscape made of earth, while in *The Oscillation* (1975; also Fig. 12) the earth patterns trace the universe's complexity while revealing its underlying simplicity. Earth is our inhabitance; it is the substance of our planet, our source of nourishment, and our confinement, as shown in Valeriy's burial-like work with two toy mannequins, *Life of a Man in Two Parts* (1975; Fig. 13). With striking bareness this object deals with the problem of "to be" and "not to be." Everyone born is bound to die. And our living planet is in fact a massive burial site. The ancient Chinese sources inform us that the compulsory rest in the terrestrial realm is necessary for the "return of vi-

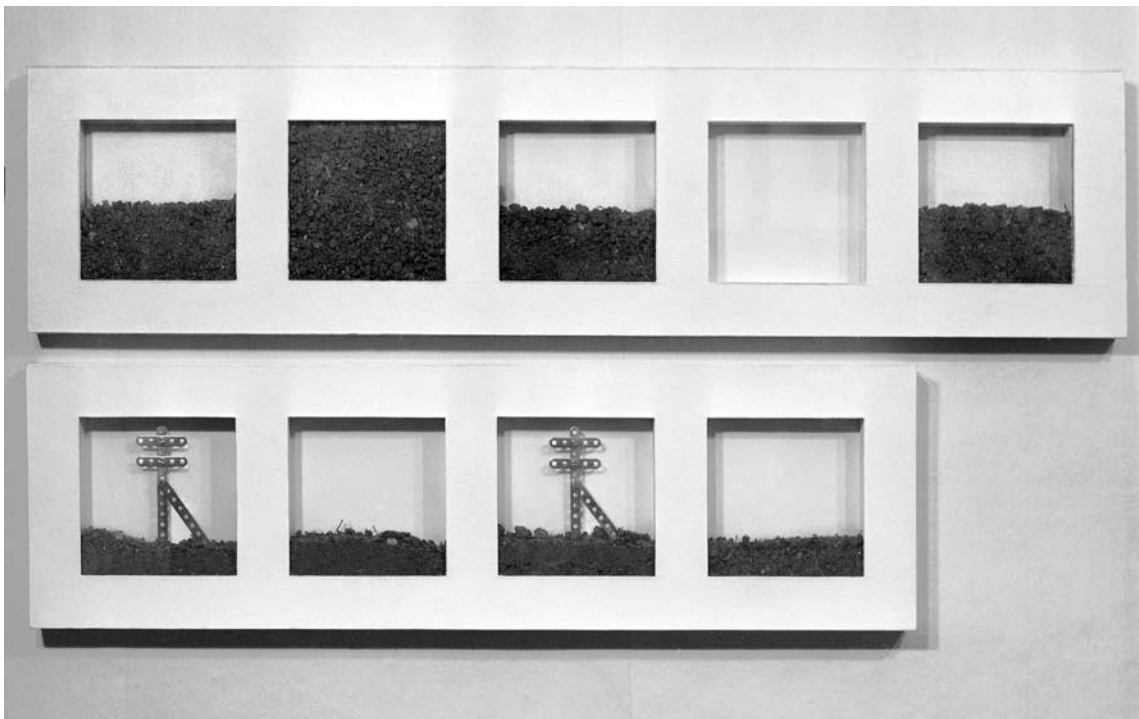


Fig. 12 Valeriy Gerlovin / *Oscillation* (top), 1975 / Masonite, glass, soil, and stainless steel / 25 x 105 x 4 cm / *The View from the Train* (below), 1975 / Masonite, glass, soil, and stainless steel / 25 x 85 x 4 cm / Collection of the artist /

tality through the heavenly aspect... because the extinction of yesterday is necessary for the preparation for tomorrow. After all, we do not only live in one time, but we live, as it were, in an onion of different time shells."⁴ In such a short article, it is better to condense the discussion of death and earthly dust into a couple of simple thoughts: that death is a regression into hiddenness, dust is also a cosmic material, and cosmos in Greek means "order."

Using another natural material, Valeriy sculpted from bread as if it were clay. That pseudo earthenware art was prompted by his natural tendency from childhood to roll little pieces of bread into different forms, as in *A Chess Game*, made out of white bread and pumpernickel. He displayed his little bread objects in glass cases of different types: *Collection of the Non-Smoker* (1976), *Russian Jewelry of the 20th Century* (1976), and the *Bread Tree* series (1976–81), the last featuring a variety of *Bread Insects*.

In parallel with his manually-produced pieces, Valeriy exercised his linguistic facilities in a bizarre form—in the manner of pronouncements on a range of issues, domestic, social, and philosophical. All his tongue-in-cheek *Pronouncements* were accompanied by drawings and addressed to his spouse, nicknamed "Bura-Le," who was in charge of all external duties in the world (including arranging celestial processions), corresponding to the interplay of male and female forces (much like *purusha* and *prakriti* in the Vedic tradition).

In New York in the early eighties, our Manhattan loft-garage on Spring Street was crowded with new conceptual works. They obtained a different face but retained the same message, albeit modified under the new conditioning. It seems to us that we moved from the early "Greek" sensibility characteristic of our Moscow period to the "Roman" monumentality of forms typical of our time in New York. If Rimma's cubes grew into full-size statues of cubical men, Valeriy's works were blown-up into the fragmentations of faces and heads with bulging mosaic eyes made from paint syringes. During this period, Valeriy began to paint faces and long figures on

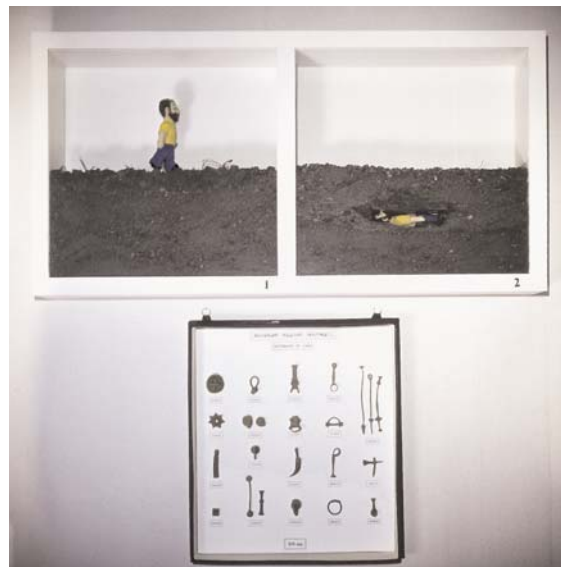


Fig. 13 Valeriy Gerlovin / *Life of a Man in Two Parts* (above), 1975 / Masonite, glass, soil, and toy mannequins / 46 x 88.1 x 10.8 cm / *Collection of the Non-Smoker* (below), 1976 / Bread, cardboard, and glass / 43.2 x 28 x 5.1 cm / Collection of the artist /



Fig. 14 View of Valeriy Gerlovin's studio in Manhattan, 1987 / Left wall: a series of metal reliefs / Back: A *Chairman*, aluminum; behind it are two wooden *Totems*, *The Ladder*, the metal relief *Vertical 5*, and three wooden reliefs from the series *Head Crowds*. The bulging eyes in the top relief are made of syringes. / Photo archive of the artist /

large, upside-down wooden staircases (Fig. 14). Each inverted step housed a fragment of the painting, and the sum total of these segments unfolded into one complete artwork.

Soon, the heads from the paintings and sculptures received monumental treatment in murals made right on the walls of galleries. Valeriy's most interesting mural was done in less than a week's time in 1984 in the enormous space of the Mattress Factory Art Museum, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Fig. 15). While he was making the frescoes, Rimma shot a video that showed the whole process of creation in a rather parabolic way. Half buried in the floor, the mural heads looked like the anonymous spirits of some excavated ancient temple. We felt as if we were trespassing into something from *illo tempore* that we recreated and ritualized by our own hands. The video monitors were installed in the eyes of one of these guardians, adding a modern dynamic to our bald-headed installation, which looked like an intentional step into the ground where the humans and gods of the past were preserved in awesome majesty. The reflections on the shiny floor increased the sense of an abyss, while the low rhythmic sounds of the video (*Ancient New York Mosaics*, 1984, with music by Charles Morrow and Glen Velez) resonated in the vacuum-like space like a shamanic chant. We later made one more video, about our friend Jean Brown, the collector of Dada, Surrealism, and Fluxus. The video focused on her "artless art" and her disarming power of kindness (*Not Jean Brown*, 1987, edited by Mark Bloch, with soundtrack by John Cage).

In 1985, Valeriy developed what is probably his

most important series of metal reliefs, featuring cut-out heads and punched-out numbers. Dealing with different numerological symbols, many of these reliefs are made out of large sheets of aluminum, which are folded like origami. This method emphasizes the oneness of the matrix of creation and the unity that underlies the multiplicity of reality. Different numbers punched on these sticking-out heads reflect the ancient tradition of putting the seal of the lamb and the number of the beast on the forehead. His seemingly mechanical metropolis of human sameness usually presents numerical arrangements of the Pythagorean tetractys, or magic square (Fig. 16). They puzzle with its marvelous arrangements of numbers that stand to each other in a perfect harmony embedded in the concept of mathematical beauty. Several metal reliefs with the tetractys show the paradigm of creation from one to ten, in which ten is a turning point of all counting, returning to the completeness and unity of one but on a higher octave. Postulating the reconciliation of the notions of unity and diversity, Valeriy at the same time stresses the need to recover identity out of the sameness inherent in life. In a manner typical of the conceptual vocabulary with its embrace of the absurd, he cut out and folded a seated figure of a chairman (1986; Fig. 14) who is a kind of centaur (but in this case half man, half chair) with a protruding sexual symbol.

His series of magic squares reflects the Pythagorean concept of the physical universe as an immense magic-square arrangement of innumerable contrasting forces. In the simple magic square of order three, any three numbers in a row (horizontal, vertical, or diagonal) add up to fifteen. The number five, located at the crossroads of all other numbers, functions as a five-pointed star that traditionally symbolizes not only man, but a quintessential state as well. With this, Valeriy's magic squares touch on the same issues that lay behind Rimma's *cubitis magikia*, or "magic" cubology. After several sculptures that incorporate the Chinese Lo Shu Magic Square, which works as a numerological



Fig. 15 View of Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovina's installation at the Mattress Factory Art Museum, Pittsburgh, 1984 / *Ancient New York Mosaics* is pictured. The video monitors are installed in the eyes of the head on the right. / Photo archive of the artists /

mandala, Valeriy turned to the mandala itself, in which the earth is depicted as a formative square as opposed to the circle of heaven.

The move from the square forms to the circles was natural and timely for both of us. His new series of metal circles was connected to the idea of circular time, the compass, and calendar, showing the uniting notion of coiling time that is radiating around a single measureless point (Fig. 17). These works inspire thoughts on the concept of time in an artistic manner. It is generally believed that time passes—maybe it stays where it is, while we pass around and around... Waiting for no man, time does not permit stopping or rewinding for a single moment.

A few words have to be said about our joint work, which began with our artists' books in 1972 and extended to different media: objects, performances, and photography. They include the soft encyclopedia *Who is Who* (1977), a linen bag filled with forty-two cushions labeled with such statements as "I am the best," "I am you," "I am Gog and Magog," and "I am in the bag"; and another tactile object, *A Horse in the Shape of a Snake* (1977), filled with different objects. The box-object *Stones* (1977) is a collection of stones with cards describing the "destiny" of each stone. For example, stone #69 is a corner stone, #85 a twin of 86, #100 a petrified eye, and stone #124 is lost without further notice. We collaborated on several albums—*The Trees, or the Manual "How to Photograph Dreams"* (1978) and *Transformation of Functions* (1978), both with photographs by Igor

Makarevich—and the series of utopian projects. *A Utopian Project of the All-World Birthday Celebration* (1977) suggested that all people born on the same day gather in one spot of the globe when the day comes and celebrate together, thus keeping mankind united every day of the year. To utilize everyone's potential and therefore that of humanity

Fig. 16 Valeriy Gerlovina / *Magic Square*, 1986 / Aluminum / 99.1 x 99.1 x 30.5 cm / Collection of the artist /

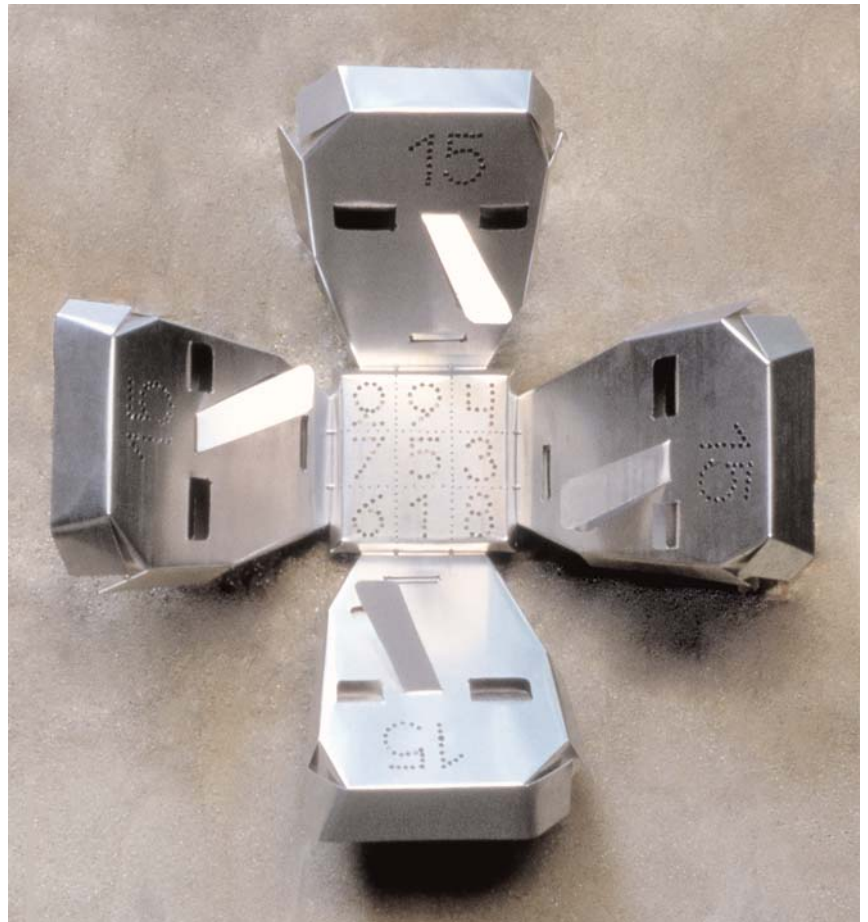




Fig. 17 Valeriy Gerlovin / *Calendar*, 1988 / Aluminum / 60.3 cm in diameter, 7.6 cm deep / Collection of the artist /

as a whole, *A Utopian Project for a Complete Exchange* (1977) proposed a list of many-sided exchanges among individuals of varying nationalities, ages, viewpoints, ideals, documents, loves, pasts and futures, spiritual outlooks and body types, etc. Our experiments in the production of the art almanac *Vozdukhoplavanie* (Aeronautics, 1973) culminated in publishing activity in New York. Together with Vagrich Bakhchanyan we issued a series of six assemblings titled *Collective Farm*, whose pages are made of envelopes with inserts showing works by different artists from various countries.

A significant portion of our performance work is incorporated into the album *Mirror Games* (1977; see Bobrinskaia, “Moscow Conceptual Performance Art in the 1970s,” Figs. 13, 14). Some of the pieces stand alone, as in the triptych *The Eggs* (1977,

photos by Viktor Novatsky), which develops in three stages: the first depicts two eggs with our bodies in the embryonic position inside them, in the second we are frying the eggs, and in the third picture we are eating the eggs as a self-sacrificial meal. Supper at last. This performance was enacted in a *ritornello* manner, seemingly returning to the initial state, but on a higher octave. It was like an Ouroboros snake eating its own tail and thus recreating itself through its own renewed substance. For as long as man is sensitive to the metaphoric games that propose participation in the universal, it is possible to trace in them the law of regularity in nature.

Toward the middle of the eighties, the nucleus of our art creation in three-dimensional objects was formed, and therefore ready for revision, expansion, and rejuvenation. The metaphorical realm of photography, the colorful mirage of “photomorgana,” emerged from the seeds of our early performances, conceptual objects, and visual poetry. We began the photographic series *Photoglyphs*,⁵ which literally means “carving with light” (in Greek *phos-*, *photos-* denotes “light,” and *glyphe* means “carving”). This series was presented in the exhibition *Photoglyphs* (Fig. 21), organized by the New Orleans Museum of Art. Containing mainly close-ups, with cryptographic words and drawings made directly on the skin, which we used as human parchment, the show (which featured an extensive catalogue) traveled to venues in fifteen cities from 1994 to 1999. In *Photoglyphs* we photographed the “chosen” words without verbal context, placing this curious organic metaphysics not within the traditional bookish environment, but directly on faces, moving it into the realm of poetic truth. In such a new environment, words appear in the full body of their allusive meaning, not as faceless morphemes of the linear textual form. In this way, we give them flesh. At the same time, our own thoughts become visible, recharged through the expression of facial features. For example, we literally dissect the word “believe” on the forehead through the use of braids (Fig. 18). By demonstrating the treason of falsity, the word is

Fig. 18 Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin / *Be-lie-ve*, © 1990 / C-print / 101.6 x 101.6 cm / Collection of the artists /



Fig. 19 Installation view of the retrospective exhibition *An Organic Union*, Fine Arts Museum of Long Island, Hempstead, 1991 / Photo archive of the artists /



forced to reveal its contradictory core. The reliability of the mind, a question investigated in the cubes, is thus addressed in our photographs. A lie can come in the form of a truth, and the truth can come in the form of a lie. Be-lie-ve it or not. By words, we can arrive anywhere, but not necessarily at the truth. The Sufi master Mullah Nasreddin once said: “I never tell the truth.” If this is true, it contradicts his statement. But if he lies, as he says he does, it means he really is telling the truth.

In 1991, we had a retrospective exhibition at the Fine Arts Museum of Long Island, which included both our objects and our photographs in metal-frame constructions that look like an extension of Valeriy’s metal sculptures (Fig. 19). While the style of the close-up photographs derived from Valeriy’s close-up murals and paintings, the words came from Rimma’s cubes. Our collective creative imagination synthesizes ideas from different realms; it nurtures a new aesthetic offspring within us. The male/female union contributes much. Fused into a joint “receptacle” for the phenomenal world, it naturally increases the outcome. The union of opposites tends to produce new seeds.

Perhaps the following is an accurate enough analogy for our photographic practice: similar to how a chemist employs tinctures and flasks for his experiments, we use our minds as solutions and our faces as vessels. The roles of the observers and

the observed are thus extended to the unifying state of being the observatory itself. In technical terms, this method is convenient, compact, and self-sufficient. For example, we use hair, the material that happens to be near at hand (and on the head). The series of linear drawings made from braids explores the idea of projection beyond the self, as a personal wave of a transpersonal impulse (Fig. 20). The creative source acts in the particular moment and in the particular place, issuing force, time, and space out of the self. In a way, it is a child of itself. The filamentous structure of flaxen hair, in which nature has encloded woman, permits us to create a sublimated form of the body with the minimum of corporeal density, thus arriving at the exaltation of consciousness. Recalling the authoritative premise “The very hairs on our heads are all numbered,” hair is the most natural primordial outfit of a woman, the most archetypal fashion that never goes out of fashion. In that respect, the aesthetic quest (and what is aesthetics—in Greek it means “sense perception”) builds on that idea. In the cultural and religious intensity that characterized the early arts, the benevolent side of reality was shown by harmonious qualities when physical appearance was not supposed to overshadow the metaphysical aspect. Socrates is credited with the prayer to give him beauty in the inner soul, and to grant him that inner and outer man be as one.

Many of our photographic works are made in a

Fig. 20 Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin / *Madonna with Child*, © 1992 / C-print / 101.6 x 101.6 cm / Collection of the artists /



sculptural form, as for example *Dust* (1990–91), from the series *Flat Solids* (Fig. 21). In the fictitious cube of D-us-T (“us” is written in red letters on the forehead), the context of the photograph increases the illusion of volume, bringing it into the square

package of diffused particles, a theoretically suspicious combination of shape and shapelessness. Our sculptural photographs, on which we work now more than ever, extend the form and the meaning of photography to the three-dimensional world of



Fig. 21 Installation view of the traveling exhibition *Photoglyphs*, New Orleans Museum of Art, 1994 / Left to right: *Birth of Aphrodite*, © 1992 / C-print in aluminum frame with pencil drawing / 105.4 x 121.9 cm / *Be-lie-ve*, © 1990 / C-print in stainless-steel frame made by the artists / 121.9 x 121.9 cm / *Dust*, © 1990-91 / C-prints in stainless-steel construction / 121.9 x 121.9 cm / Photo archive of the artists /

Fig. 22 Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin / *Pilgrim*, © 2000 / C-print / 101.6 x 76.2 cm / Collection of the artists /



objects. The different series dictate a variety of sculptural forms, from cut-outs in metal frame with additional pencil drawings to elaborate sculptural reliefs.

If the *Photoglyphs* “talk” primarily through words and drawings, the later series of photographs called *Perhappiness* is a visionary development (Figs. 22–24). We see it as a mode of being wherein “perhaps” and “happiness” are entwined. *Perhappiness* encodes the play of intuition, theurgical elements, the contemplative state, the aesthetic quest, and more. Each of us has a dosage of happiness that can be characterized as perhappiness. Many live in the incessant pursuit of desires, and that is like a dog that chases its own tail. Real happiness is unconditioned; it does not fade away with the change of a situation. It is a balanced state wherein the dualism of happiness and unhappiness disappear: a treasure hard to find. The magical part of this series deals with the play of paradoxes on which the bittersweet scenario of life is based. We try to convey a message through subtle humor, switching to paradoxical propositions when the rational mind reaches its limit. Unintentionally, many of our photographs reflect the weirdness of quantum theories: How do you like it when an atom can be on the left and right side at the same time? But if an observer looks at it, the atom “chooses” to be seen only in one place.

Nature itself is full of magical tricks. For example, in the case of the so-called paradoxical frog, the adult is less than one third the size of its tadpole, and can serve as a model for human society. Why not? Has it not been stressed in different scriptures that those who wish to become wise must be like children? Of course, it is difficult to find among the learned those who would be willing to undertake such a feat. Artists have fewer limitations. They can afford to play with *perhappiness*.

¹ *Russian Samizdat Art* (New York: Willis, Locker and Owens, 1986), paper, cloth, and limited boxed edition of 125, with signed silkscreens by Vagrich Bakhchanyan, Michael Chernyshov, Henry Khudiakov, Komar and Melamid, and ours. In addition to our essay “Russian Samizdat Art,” there are two related articles by John E. Bowlit and Szymon Bojko, edited by Charles Doria. Upon the publication of *Russian Samizdat Art*, the collector of Russian avant-garde art George Costakis called us from Greece to say that the book would be sought-after like any other Russian avant-garde item. His verdict sounded both elating and upsetting. While the book was never published in our native language and became a historical relic or a book-in-itself, it appeared in Polish in Warsaw in 1990.

² Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, “The Barren Flowers of Evil,” *Artforum* (March 1980): 51.

³ C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 292.

⁴ Richard Wilhelm, *Lectures on the I Ching* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1979), 22, 160.

⁵ This series, like many other of our works, can be seen on the artists’ Web site, www.gerlovin.com.



NOTES TO THE CAPTIONS

- i *Quintessence*: “above me” is written on the inside lid, “below me” on the bottom, and “in front of me” on each side.
- The Tool for Viewing Malevich’s Black Square*: If one looks through the small square hole in the black trapezoid, the optical illusion makes it appear as a black square.
- ii The half with the blue convex “M” that stands for male can be united with the red concave “Ж” (female). Folded together, the cube represents the androgynous unit; its purple color is a combination of red and blue.
- iii *Moon–Earth*: The text “This cube is 8 cm closer to the Moon than the other cube” is written on the upper cube, left. On its right, the text reads: “This cube is 8 cm farther from the Earth than the other cube.” On the lower cube, left: “This cube is 8 cm closer to the Earth than the other cube.” On the lower part of the cube, right: “This cube is 8 cm farther from the Moon than the other cube.”
- A Mongolian*: “1 sq. km of Mongolia” is written on the lid, “1 Mongolian” on the smaller cube inside.
- iv *Tetrahedron* features the text “The cube in the form of a tetrahedron.”
- Obliteration of the Edges* contains the text “Obliteration of the edges creates new edges,” a pun on the Soviet slogan “Obliteration of the divisions between the town and the village.”
- v *Depraved Element*: With the removal of the small orange cube titled “The Depraved Element,” the perfect shape of the white cube, one of the five absolute Platonic solids, is destroyed.
- Exit into Another Dimension*: “Exit into another dimension” is written on each side. All sides lead to the same central hole.
- vi *You Think*: “You think” is written on the lid and “But I am!” appears on the inner cube, a paraphrase of the Descartes axiom “I think, therefore I am.”

The Cage: The text “The bird sees that the world is in the cage” appears on the smaller cube inside.

- vii *Or*: When rotated, three words appear in sequence: “or-bit,” “or-gan,” “or-der.”

Day by Day: When rotated, the word “day” appears to flash behind the front panel with four holes.

Before–After: If the panel with the word “before” is opened, one can see the word “birth” underneath it. Behind the panel with the word “after,” the word “death” is written.

Momentum: The text flashes when the work is rotated.

Severity–Serenity: When the small circle is rotated, the word “se-ren-ity” appears.

- viii *Agoing*: The central circle with “-ing” can be rotated, indicating the continuum of the past.

Fortune: If opened, the word “misfortuneless” appears.

Un-di-vi-ded In-di-vi-dual: All circles can be rotated.

Self: The middle circle with the word “self” can be rotated, thus creating other arrangements: “myself,” “himself,” “herself,” and “yourself.”

Nonsense: The panel featuring “no” can be lifted to reveal the morpheme “esse,” thereby shifting the initial meaning of “nonsense” to “essence,” as in two sides of the same “sense.”

- ix *W-hole*: The circle with “hole” can be rotated.

Spiral Clock: The spiral hand can be rotated.

E-art-h: The panel with “art” can be rotated, thus gradually revealing the sentence “E-art-h p-art-s, m-art-ir c-art-s.”

Level: That palindrome is written on three circles, each of which can be rotated.

Fig. 23 Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin / *The Grail*, © 2001 / C-print / 101.6 x 76.2 cm / Collection of the artists /

Fig. 24 Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin / *Reading Light*, © 2002 / C-print / 101.6 x 76.2 cm / Collection of the artists /